

## Racial Discrimination Act out until 2010

The Federal Labor government has failed to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) despite repeated assurances that it would do so since it was elected in 2007.

Instead the Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin has announced that the RDA will not be reinstated until 31 December 2010.

The Federal government made this announcement in its latest policy statement, Landmark Reform to the Welfare System, Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act and Strengthening of the Northern Territory Response, released in November.

The Northern and Central Land Councils have been calling on both the Federal Government and the Coalition of Australian Governments to reinstate the RDA and to restore Aboriginal people's legislative human rights – rights taken for granted by every other Australian citizen.

NLC Chief Executive Kim

Hill earlier said that without the RDA Aboriginal people will continue to have no legal redress under Australian law in relation to the Northern Territory Emergency Response laws, that is, the federal intervention.

"The Racial Discrimination Act was suspended with the express purpose of denying Aboriginal people everyday, common law human rights so that the federal government could implement its intervention into every aspect of our lives," he said.

"This does not happen to any other Australian citizen."

At a meeting of its 90 members in Tennant Creek in November, the Central Land Council said that the Federal Government had squandered a valuable opportunity to reset

the relationship with Aboriginal people.

CLC members said that the Federal Government's application of the RDA to the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation still ignores Aboriginal people's interests and its 'special measures' remain discriminatory.

CLC director David Ross said that he felt deeply disappointed with the Government.

"The Australian Government should instead be working with Aboriginal people to find solutions to some very difficult, long-term problems," Mr Ross said.

The RDA was suspended by the former Howard Government in July 2007 to enable the passage of the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation.



CLC members at the Council's November meeting in Tennant Creek

## Income quarantine laws set for a national roll out

In a bid to make its income management scheme non-discriminatory the Federal government announced in November that it will extend its income management laws and make it compulsory for all Australian welfare recipients and not just Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

This announcement came in the government's policy statement Landmark Reform to the Welfare System, Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act and Strengthening of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and

will be implemented from 1 July 2010.

But the latest suite of "welfare reforms" will only apply to the Northern Territory before it is rolled out across the nation.

This scheme will operate similarly to how it

operates for Aboriginal people living in Prescribed Areas of the Northern Territory: 50 percent of welfare payments will be quarantined so that it can only be spent on essentials such as food, clothing and rent.

recipients);

- assessed by a delegate of the Secretary (in practice, a Centrelink social worker) as requiring income management for reasons including vulnerability to financial crisis, domestic violence or economic abuse; and
- referred for income management by child protection authorities.

**Who will be exempt?**

If you:

- can demonstrate that you are a responsible parent

- ensure your children attend school regularly and consistently
- have regular paid employment or are engaged in formal study
- are a veteran
- are on an aged or disability support pension

The government amendments are being referred to a Senate Inquiry.

The deadline for submissions is February 1, 2009 and the Committee will report by March 9, 2010

## Lose community control, lose the battle

One of the most persistent criticisms of the intervention has been that Aboriginal people have been sidelined and not included in decision making

Valda Shannon, a cultural liaison officer with the Barkly Shire and a CLC delegate, said that the new alcohol restrictions imposed by the Australian Government further eroded Aboriginal people's ability to participate in a solution.

"I was involved with Julalikari Council back in 1995 as community development officer working with the Night Patrol and the Council to put some restrictions on alcohol because it was

causing problems for our people and a lot of the ideas came from the old people.

"Alcohol was taking up a lot of our time dealing with people and causing a lot of problems in our communities

"We had to fight for restrictions, that's how the idea of Thirsty Thursday came about.

Thirsty Thursday worked because most people were on social security and payments came on Thursday but the Government changed all that.

"Payments were made on different days.

"It felt like we weren't at the



table anymore.

"It had been hijacked by non-Aboriginal people and governments

"I think its important for Aboriginal people to control, to make decisions, to participate in discussions about how alcohol should be sold because we know our families.

"We live with them, we live with the issues that come with it. It is a stronger message coming from us rather than the Government.